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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002548

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SUBJECT: IRAQ: TURKISH READOUT ON ISTANBUL NEIGHBORS MEETING

REF: A. ANKARA 2490

[1](#)B. STATE 79107

[1](#)C. ANKARA 2432

Classified By: Counselor for Political-Military Affairs Timothy A. Bett  
s for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Iraq and its neighbors--and numerous guests--held a "friendly and interactive" foreign ministers' meeting in Istanbul April 29-30, according to Turkish MFA officials. Our interlocutors reported relatively little squabbling over the communique text, though they apparently had to beat back a Syrian bid to include language rejecting the threat or use of force against Iraq or its neighbors, a clear jab at the U.S. Zibari and his Egyptian and Syrian counterparts reportedly had a sharp exchange on ethnic and sectarian politics in Iraq. The Turks are seeking deeper UN involvement in Iraq, especially in Kirkuk. In their bilateral meeting, FonMins Zibari and Gul reportedly edged closer to deals on an additional border gate (or gates) and Turkey's desire to re-open its consulate in Mosul. So far Turkey is off on the right foot with the ITG. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On May 3, MFA Deputy Director General for the Middle East Safak Gokturk provided PolMilCouns and PolMilOff a readout from the April 29-30 Iraq neighbors' meeting held in Istanbul, as well as the April 30 bilateral meeting between FonMins Gul and Zibari. Full text of the neighbors' meeting communique is in ref a. Gokturk reported that all the foreign ministers were present except for Saudi FonMin Saud al-Faisal, who was accompanying Crown Prince Abdullah on his trip to the U.S. ITG PM Ja'afari had hoped to attend, but begged off pending final swearing-in of his cabinet. According to Gokturk, Ja'afari said he will try to come to Turkey soon. Gokturk noted that in addition to the usual lineup of Iraq and its neighbors plus Egypt and Bahrain (the latter technically in its capacity as Chairman of the Gulf Cooperation Council), the Secretaries-General of both the Arab League and the OIC were present, as was SRSG Qazi, and a European Commission representative. These additional guests were also permitted to sit through the ministers' deliberations on the final communique text, but only as observers.

"Friendly and Interactive..."

[1](#)3. (C) The meeting followed the usual format for neighbors meetings, Gokturk reported. The tone was "friendly and interactive," he said. Senior officials discussed the communique text on April 29. PM Erdogan made brief public remarks to inaugurate the session on April 30, then departed as the meeting moved into closed session. The ministers made opening statements, followed by lunch and then an open discussion of the draft communique. Gokturk highlighted the significance of this neighbors meeting, the first since Jan. 30 elections, and noted the communique's strong pledge "to support and cooperate with" the ITG. (NOTE: In a discussion earlier on May 3, MFA Iraq Desk Officer Hasan Sekizkok told PolMilOff that Zibari had successfully requested the ministers to add stronger language to para. four, the earlier (Turkish) draft of which did not contain this pledge. END NOTE.)

...But a "Frank Exchange" Over Sectarian and Ethnic Politics

[1](#)4. (C) Sekizkok (and, less directly, Gokturk) described to us a spontaneous "frank exchange" between the opening statements and the lunch break among Zibari, Egyptian FonMin Gheit, and Syrian FonMin al-Sharaa. Zibari asked that the Arab media end its "incitement" (Sekizkok's word) against certain Iraqi leaders, especially--but not limited to--Kurds. Gheit reportedly responded that many in the Arab world are uncomfortable with ethnic differences being openly stressed in the political process in Iraq. Al-Sharaa spoke in support of Gheit.

[1](#)5. (C) Zibari responded that Saddam Hussein's regime marginalized ethnic and sectarian groups, and that now the Iraqi people were struggling to overcome this legacy and

unite. Zibari noted that "a certain community" did not participate in the Jan. 30 elections, and that Shia mosques throughout the country and Kurds living in Mosul were now being targeted. Zibari reportedly emphasized that no one in Iraq favors the country's division or disintegration. FonMin Gul closed the discussion by noting that the diversity of Iraq should be a source of strength, and that Iraq and its neighbors should work to stress Iraq's common national interests.

#### Syrian Attempts at Mischief on Communique Text

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16. (C) Both Gokturk and Sekizkok reported relatively little wrangling over the communique's text. Syria sought to add a statement along the lines that the neighbors would reject the threat or use of force against Iraq or any of its neighbors. When Zibari assured the Syrians that they had no reason to fear aggression from Iraq, the Syrians responded that their real concern was over aggression "from outside the region." According to our Turkish interlocutors, Gul broke in to say that such language would be seen as provocative, would be viewed as a sign of weakness, and would damage the credibility of the neighbors meeting platform. The ministers agreed to add a relatively harmless phrase to the end of para. 20 (the neighbors' initiative will contribute, inter alia, to "solidarity to ensure security in the area."). Syria also reportedly objected to language at the end of para. 4 supporting Iraqi federalism, so the ministers added the anodyne phrase that Iraq should have a federal structure "if so decided by the Iraqi people."

#### Turks Want the UN In

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17. (C) PolMilOff noted to Sekizkok that the language in para. 10--expressing the "necessity for the United Nations to establish itself more firmly and broadly on the ground in monitoring and assisting the political process and economic rehabilitation"--seemed somewhat stronger than in previous such communiqués. Sekizkok acknowledged that this was somewhat stronger language and that this was how Turkey had drafted it. He said that Turkey is disappointed that the UN is not yet more deeply established in Iraq, and particularly that it has no presence in Kirkuk. He said that he had asked a UN official at the meeting why this was the case, and that the official responded that SYG Annan favored opening a UN office in Kirkuk but that SRSG Qazi was opposed (NFI). Sekizkok also noted that--in his view--the SYG's reports on Iraq tend to be far less detailed than those on Cyprus, an issue which Sekizkok worked previously.

18. (C) Gokturk added a few more notes on the communique:

--Para. 6 (on war crimes committed against Kuwait and Iran) was proposed by the Kuwaitis.

--The Turks added para. 7--supporting maintaining the timeline for the constitution and elections by the end of 2005--"after consulting with you."

--Para. 12 (on terrorism) includes condemning attacks against "stabilization efforts." Gokturk said this was the most the Turks could win agreement to include condemning attacks against MNF-I.

--Gokturk said the Turks "very carefully" drafted para. 13 to deter insertion of a timetable for CF to leave Iraq.

#### Interior and Foreign Ministers Meetings to Continue

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19. (C) Gokturk noted that Turkey will host the next neighbors interior ministers' meeting as soon as the new Iraqi Interior Minister is "in full grip of his portfolio." He added that Turkey has specific proposals on border security to propose at that meeting. Finally, he reported that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain had all volunteered to host the next foreign ministers' meeting; Iran will host the next one, with either Saudi Arabia or Bahrain to follow. He guessed that the next such meeting would not take place before the June U.S.-EU-Iraq meeting in Brussels.

#### Gul-Zibari Bilateral: Perhaps Some Openings

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110. (C) Gokturk also provided us a brief readout on the April 30 Gul-Zibari bilateral. He said that Zibari seemed "more open" on nettlesome Iraq-Turkey bilateral issues such as the second border gate and the Turks' desire to re-open their consulate in Mosul. Zibari told Gul he would instruct a technical team to meet with the Turks as soon as possible on the second gate. Gokturk said both sides seem to be approaching consensus on the need to build more than one new gate.

11. (C) According to Gokturk, Zibari stated that the only obstacle to re-opening the Mosul consulate was the insurgency; the minister did not cite the concern that the Iranians would insist on opening consulates if the Turks did. Gokturk noted that the insurgency would not allow Turkey to set up shop in Mosul immediately anyway. Gokturk reported that the ministers only discussed the PKK briefly, and that Zibari stated that the ITG is determined to deal with this problem eventually.

12. (C) Gokturk added that just before the neighbors meeting, the Iraqi MFA had sent a diplomatic note to the Turkish embassy in Baghdad seeking further information on training courses Turkey has offered for the ISF. Gokturk thought this was a positive development and perhaps indicates that the Iraqis are giving serious considering coming to Turkey for training.

Comment: A Pretty Good Start for GOT-ITG Relations  
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13. (C) The Turks generally give us readouts from neighbors meetings which can sound somewhat self-serving. But it appears to us that the neighbors' platform has been generally constructive, and the final communique--primarily drafted by the Turks--is quite positive overall. As the Turks and the Arab world grapple with a Shia- and Kurd-led government in Baghdad, we hope the neighbors' meetings can continue to provide a platform for some positive growth in the regional relationship. The Turks were somewhat disappointed that PM Ja'afari did not come to Istanbul--since this meeting was already postponed once at his request--but for now they are taking Ja'afari at his word that he will visit soon. We believe (in response to ref b tasker) that Turkey's positive statement upon the ITG's formation (ref c) and its hosting an apparently successful neighbors meeting constitute getting off on the right foot with the new Iraqi government. End comment.

14. (U) Iraq posts minimize considered.  
EDELMAN